

Research Brief #1: Principal Efficacy Beliefs for Instructional Leadership and their Relation to Teachers' Sense of Collective Efficacy and Student Achievement

IMPORTANT QUOTE:

“By comparison, the size of the indirect link from principal efficacy beliefs to student achievement was greater than that of the link found between student minority status and achievement”.

What is this study about?

The purpose of this study was twofold. Firstly, the researchers were interested in testing the validity and reliability of a questionnaire to measure principal efficacy beliefs specifically in relation to their role as instructional leaders. Secondly, the researchers were interested in examining the relationship between school principals' sense of efficacy for instructional improvement, collective teacher efficacy, and student achievement.

This study was based on the following three hypotheses:

1. Principal efficacy beliefs for instructional leadership would be positively related to the collective efficacy beliefs of the teachers in their schools;
2. Collective teacher efficacy would be positively related to student achievement differences among schools;
3. Principal efficacy beliefs for instructional improvement would be positively related to student achievement through their impact on teachers' sense of collective efficacy.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

The researchers noted that efficacy beliefs vary widely depending on the task. Given the task specific nature of efficacy beliefs and the broad array of tasks for which school leaders are responsible (e.g. discipline, scheduling, community engagement, etc.) the researchers focused their study specifically on principals' beliefs about their ability to carry out the tasks related to instructional leadership (due to consensus in the literature regarding the importance of instructional leadership to student learning). The authors defined school principals' sense of efficacy for instructional leadership as “the degree to which principals believe themselves capable of organizing and executing the courses of action required to support teachers in improving instruction and student learning”. There was also a need to create a measurement tool to measure principal efficacy for instructional leadership since current measures of principal efficacy were not sufficiently focused on this particular element of leadership.

THE DETAILS OF THE STUDY

Participants/Method and Procedures

This study involved a convenience sample of 95 school principals and 1,623 teachers serving students in rural schools in a Midwestern area in the United States. Student level data for mathematics and reading, along with demographic information (e.g. minority population, free/reduced lunch rate, etc.) were obtained from a state accountability data system. Measures included the Principal Efficacy Beliefs for Instructional Leadership (PEBIL) questionnaire and the short version of the Collective Efficacy Belief Scale for teachers (developed by Goddard in 2002).

Two primary steps of data analysis included validating the principal efficacy questionnaire using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and conducting multi-level structural equation modeling (MSEM) analysis to test the three research hypotheses.

Results:

The study demonstrated strong psychometric support for the Principal Efficacy Beliefs for Instructional Leadership questionnaire. The results also demonstrated that principal efficacy for instructional leadership was a strong predictor of collective teacher efficacy. The researchers noted that “outcomes for principal efficacy belief - resiliency, effort, persistence, and creativity - may influence the degree to which teachers believe they can organize and execute the actions required to help their students learn”. The second hypothesis was also supported. Collective teacher efficacy was strongly related to student achievement differences among schools. Collective teacher efficacy was more “strongly related to student achievement than all student and school demographic variables - including poverty and race”. The authors noted that collective teacher efficacy mediates “thought and action by influencing efforts and choices made by my group members in pursuit of common organizational goals”. Finally, the study demonstrated a positive link between principal efficacy beliefs for instructional leadership and student achievement that was mediated by collective teacher efficacy. The researchers noted the findings from this study are important to consider “given the historic challenges associated with finding predictors of student achievement that outweigh the influence of socio-demographic background characteristics”.

Limitations:

The authors noted that the results from this study are consistent regarding the causal direction of the influences (principal efficacy → collective teacher efficacy → increased student achievement) but do not confirm causation (since the research was not an experimental study).

Citation:

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